

OUR VALEDICTORY.

College of Physicians and Surgeons,

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE,

CLASS OF 1872.

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(A MEMBER OF THE GRADUATING CLASS.)

'Tis a base
Abandonment of reason to resign
Our right of thought.

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Mr. President, Professors, Fellow Students, Ladies and Gentlemen :

When Mazeppa was lashed to the wild horse of Tartary, and when that steed went careering onward, over the hills and through the valleys, in spite of the uncomfortableness of his position, Mr. Mazeppa undoubtedly felt relieved. While that celebrated charger on which his enemy had mounted him, thundered onward, at a speed only equaled by that other celebrated charger — the black horse that bore Sheridan from Winchester down— Mr. Mazeppa was no doubt engaged in quietly congratulating himself. For the disease with which he was afflicted, a ride on horse back, even *a la hippodrome*, is infinitely preferable to the more modern mode of treatment by *pistoling on a staircase*.

Ladies and Gentlemen : The position of these young men, just tied to the steed of science, leaving out of consideration certainly the little matter of previous wickedness, seems to me wonderfully like that of the naughty Mazeppa. Like him they feel infinitely relieved at getting out of the clutches of the old gentleman, represented in this instance by the Faculty of the Medical Department of Columbia College ; like him they are to long for ease and quietude, while condemned to ceaseless anxiety and watchfulness; like him they are to be deceived by *igni fatui* gleaming like home lamps, but luring only into swamps and fens; like him having ridden the poor beast out of confidence, out of vital force, and out of wind, they will eventually fall by the roadside, and remain as additional warnings to others who would fain occupy niches in the temple of physic. Whether in after years some few of these gentlemen may come back reinforced like Mazeppa, to rescue *Alma Mater* from the grasp of those by whom she is possessed, is a question which fickle fortune only can determine.

From time immemorial it has been the custom of graduating classes to assemble some time previous to occasions like this, and select from among their number, one to pronounce the "Valedictory." To say "good bye" to the Faculty, to the class, to the old college halls. It is a melancholy privilege, this license to officiate at a ceremony half marriage, half funeral ; this nondescript of commencement and ending, of birth and dissolution. There is something peculiarly mournful in parting, even with the hope of a speedy

reunion. Around the edges of even the wedding ceremony, there is thrown a fringe of sadness. To the young people more directly interested all is serene, but way in the background there are always a limited number of grandmothers ! and these are invariably found with their handkerchiefs to their eyes. It is the dread of *temporary* separation which gives a tinge of sadness to the happiest meetings, and causes a pall to flutter constantly above every joyous assembly of earth. But these *final*, these *life-long* separations, they are the tomb-stones sculptured out and erected thank Heaven ! on the dark corners of but few out of the many festive boards. Through the past years we have all labored persistently and hard to bring about this parting-time, and yet, to me, there is much of sorrow at the severance of old associations, mingled with the joy of being free. From this night will commence to unravel that cord of sympathy which has bound us together man to man. But a brief interval, and the strands of which that cord was once composed will occupy their places beside the other stranded friendships of the past. But a short time and the form of each old friend will be confused in the recollection of a new. And still those forgotten forms will be bowing nearer and nearer to the sod, still the feet which bear them proudly now will shuffle more and more distinctly as they pass on down the road. But how belittled is the bitterness of all external change, when contrasted with those sentimental changes which lengthened separation always brings.

These faces, which have become familiar and dear to each other, are to go out into the great cold avaricious world, and be seamed and furrowed by their little destinies of care ; the locks which now glisten above them will become grizzled, and some of them finally white, in the great bleaching-house of adversity ; their temples will grow corded with the blue veins of age, and their eyes get dim ; but never in after time, while the "wheel" remains unbroken "at the cistern," and "the pitcher at the fountain," never again while the "silver cord" remains unloosed, will they smile back as they smiled on the old Class of "Seventy-two." Like in Longfellow's "Evangeline," the paths of their possessors may cross and intercross in after years, but the faces and the hearts of twenty years from now, will be dull and cold in comparison with the brilliant faces and the warm hearts of to-day.

On such an occasion, the thoughtful men before me ought to be suffused in tears ; and yet the spirit of the veritable "Tapley" seems to have taken possession of every one of them. For three long years they have hacked at anatomy and the backs of the college benches ; they have written in their note books, and made epigrams on the college walls. For three whole winters they have been seated directly under the "practical" avalanche poured upon them by that matchless expounder, *whose grand achievement it has been to convert millions of torturing death-beds into couches of convalescent sleep*. They have passed from hand to hand and lap to lap, those "beautiful specimens," in *decayed* alcohol — specimens which, had he no greater claim to homage, would, long ere this, have stamped their possessor as the "king of hearts."¹ For months and months together, they have pounded at Surgery, and compounded in *Materia Medica* ; they have theorized in Physiology, and analyzed in Chemistry, and idealized in *Obstetrics*. They have spent no inconsiderable portion of their lives in pondering over the "revelations of St. John,"² and the "doubts of Thomas,"³ and the "Gospel of Mark."⁴ They have listened to the incomparable Metcalfe on *phthisic*, and to the incomparable McLane on *physic*. They have eaten the savory potage of professional courtesy, and learned how the offspring became ringed and streaked and speckled from Jacoby.⁵ They have known how swiftly and how pleasantly the *Sands* of college life may run, while studying with a favorite Professor, man's means of inward locomotion.⁶ They have been baffled, like hosts of those who have gone before, in endeavoring to *drape* their minds with a peculiar class of wisdom, which, if it is only "skin deep," speaks volumes for the thickness of the skin.⁷ They have listened to the lyceum lectures on the "constitution," and gloried with the lecturer that not a jot of all his inspiration is ever "borrowed stock."⁸

Whatever college truths they may have missed, Three sterling facts all well-kept note-books show : The fact that Doctor Parker does not smoke ! The fact that Doctor Parker does not drink ! The fact that Doctor Parker does not chew !

With all respect for Mr. Pergh and his philanthropy, they have been convinced that what was cruelty to the animal may be mercy to the man. They have gathered round the bounteous board of the immortal Dalton, and, after the repast was ended, have risen wondering, with the same old wonderment,

which was the richest treat, to see him "draw and quarter," or only to see him draw.⁹ They have stood within the circle charmed by Detmold, and have pitied those who had to "wait outside."¹⁰ They have listened to reason's rattle among the "dry bones" of Sabine.¹¹ They have striven, without a "beam" of light in their own eyes, to see the "moles" in the eyes of their fellow men. And as they blindly led the blind in only the "anterior chambers" of temples, which Agnew stalked clear through, they learned, at least, two lessons well: 1st, that they would never know what Agnew knew; 2d, that Agnew knew how much they did not know.¹² And finally, after their daily labors have ended—ended in quizzings and grindings, which none but embryonic Doctors know, these gentlemen have had night-mares—night-mares in which the theories of the philosophic Otis¹³ have "set the world on fire;" and in which the fingers of the flame, as they stretched upward, have inflicted scientific scorings, which none but he could heal. And then, like Bunyan, they have wakened, but not to "find it all a dream."

The individual who made the assertion that at forty, a man was "either a physician or a fool," was not, perhaps, a fool himself exactly; but my mind has always been impressed with the idea that he must have been a *homeopath*! No three score years and ten of every day experience, could give a tithe of the knowledge of disease, derived by us from these three years of College life. The testimony of those who have gone before us, that no forty years of unaided study, combined with forty years of unaided practice, can build the trusty foundation of medical science built for us in this brief time by these distinguished masters. To me it seems that their occupation, in its combination of work and thought, in its association of the ideal with the manual, resembles that of the sculptor; and that now, after putting the crowning glories to their work, like him they have drawn back to gaze on a conception only partly realized. Here are the dreamings of their souls but faintly personified, and as the chisels which for months their hands have clung to, drop for an intervening period to their level with the tools their busy brains are doubtless planning new capitals for columns of a higher order—columns on which the "drooping leaves" shall be upheld by the "peaceful lillies" underneath—columns on which the "pomegranate of plenty" shall nestle among the meshes of unity, hinting broad hints of sweet encouragement for the *baby making future*.

(*Class rises.*)

Gentlemen of the Faculty: Here stands in its modest proportion, your labored thought not yet expanded into the full magnificence of its manhood prime. But, in after years, when the members of which this idol is composed come to meet you—come with their brows covered with the lines which you alone have taught them how to trace—may they bear with them trophies teeming with gifts of recompense, more rich in value than the wealth of India,—your pearls of thought your brilliant pearls brought back to you.

Students: As a class, you look for the last time upon your benefactors:—the kindly-patient and indulgent *mentors* who have led you thus far along your chosen road. Henceforth, the penalty of your choice of avocation is, that you must *climb the hill alone!* We—are—Doctors! The egg of expectation on which we have set so fondly and so long, has at length hatched out for us a brood of "sheep-skins." A few more hours and the fledglings, of which this new brood is composed, will have commenced, like all previous fledglings, efforts to plume themselves and will begin with the same old covetousness to "peep for meal!" To-morrow there will be "No birds in last year's nest!" As the offspring of our time honored *ALMA MATER* have done for over half a century, we shall leave her stuffed with practical anatomy, and the knowledge of bitter-tasting pills and powders, which we shall doubtless never see the operation of. In the immediate future—so immediate that it will almost seem to laugh in the very face of our present splendid stock of *Æsculapian* lore—a few stained knives and from twenty to thirty tried prescriptions, will perhaps comprise, as it comprises among the "old staggers" everywhere, our whole routine. We shall all of us don spectacles at once—spectacles over the upper rims of which we can fortunately look, whenever occasion requires that we should see. We shall learn to exercise the *zygomaticæ* and the *levatores labii superioris alaque nasi*, those peculiarly expressive muscles of the face which, it seems, to be a little over half of the ambition of each Doctor to develop fully. And, eventually we shall, perhaps, even get those characteristic kinks about the "glottis" and the "epiglottis,"—those gutturals which only come with age and great experience and which are supposed to be, among the little airs of our profession, the very hardest to attain.

Professors: You look to-night for the last time upon the graduating class of "Seventy-two!" Other classes will come and go, as this has come and gone! Other affections will weave their meshes round your hearts! But from this night one golden string will cease to vibrate. Another key of the living

harp on which you play so marvelously well, has lost its tone. Touched by your skillful fingers, the old instrument will continue to yield the same rich melody as heretofore. These silent cords, added at each commencement-time, may even help to echo sweeter and sweeter future strains. But only in the misty distance, when your fingers shall forget their cunning, and your ears be deaf to the hum of toil, then only will these stilled strings wake up once more. Then will the music of their dying cadence rise again and be wafted to you, for the music of the past is always potent, when the mind is open only to the *memory of sound*. Gentlemen, it would be folly for one weak voice to essay to utter the thanks, and the farewell wishes, which are bubbling up in all these hundred hearts. Happily every one of their possessors will have the opportunity of seizing you severally by the hands, and uttering the parting word. It is the duty of my office to only *formally* say **FAREWELL!**

(1) Dr. Clark, Professor of *Practice*, is the author of the opium treatment for peritonitis. He has the largest collection of abnormal hearts in the country.

(2) Dr. St. John, Professor of Chemistry, is noted for his diligence in elucidating his branch.

(3) Prof. Thomas never gives in his adhesion to any theory which he has not first sifted.

(4) Prof. Markoe has the faculty of carrying conviction with every word he utters.

(5) Dr. Jacoby is Professor of Diseases of Children.

(6) Prof. Sands is a very rapid lecturer, and is held in high esteem for his affability.

(7) Dr. Draper is Professor of Diseases of the Skin—a hard branch for students.

(8) Prof. Parker always endeavors to reclaim patients from the vices specified. His lectures are rich as Gough's.

(9) Prof. Dalton, unsurpassed as a physiologist, is also an excellent artist, and illustrates his lectures with great skill.

(10) A trite expression, which this Professor always uses to patients whose imagination he judges to be the seat of the disease.

(11) Prof. Sabine is celebrated for his great proficiency in osteology.

(12) Dr. Agnew is Professor of Diseases of the Eye—a difficult branch for students.

(13) Prof. Otis has been lately advancing some new theories.

